Sounds : Swiss music with or without an alpine horn

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In support of "patriotism light"

My congratulations and respect for this brave, open and somewhat pugnacious article. Imhof has undoubtedly voiced the sentiments of many Swiss abroad. It's unfortunate that there are many different understandings and perceptions of patriotism.

ZVONIMIR BERNWALD, NESSELWANG, GERMANY

Imhof isn't always convincing. I'm not entirely convinced by Mr Imhof's very pragmatic concept of patriotism. Although he notes that democracy is unthinkable without patriotism, his visions go no further than party-political strategies, transport policy and cool T-shirts. And yet patriotism is also about symbols, emotions and national archetypes. The Gotthard, which you write about so fascinatingly in the same issue, is a symbol that is hard to grapple with. From the rationalist perspective of "patriotism light", that's probably something for bar-room patriots. But surely there is still lots of room for patriotism divorced from narrow-minded party-political dogma, somewhere between new-style national pride and old-style enlightenment beliefs (i.e. between "Landi '39 light" and "'68 light").

MAX NYFFELER, MUNICH, GERMANY

I have been away from home for over fifty years; briefly in Canada, but for the most part in the USA. I am very happy here and at the same time very proud to be Swiss. With my wife, a native Texan, I visit Switzerland every other year for a month in the fall. Its beauty, breathtaking scenery, impeccable transportation, its people, their lovely homes full of flowers with neat gardens and a high standard of living make Switzerland so great. We spend our time there hiking in the Alps and sometimes in the cities. Yes, there are plenty of reasons to be proud of Switzerland!

H. F. HAEMISEGGER, HOUSTON, USA

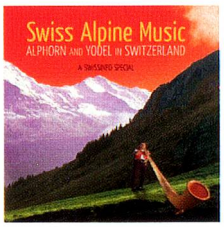
Many thanks for addressing the interesting topic of "patriotism light". At last we have an issue that can be very interesting for the Swiss abroad. I am a "true" Swiss ex-pat. I was born in Hungary and lived in Switzerland between 1975 and 1990. I therefore find the topic so interesting because patriotism has re-emerged in many countries of late. Every nation has the right to a national identity or patriotism. In Hungary, a country with a thousand-year history, a national identity was permitted to resurface after the so-called political turning point. It is rejected as "right-wing extremism" by the centre-left both at home and abroad even though it has nothing to do with that. I mean, every nation should be allowed to express its identity, provided it does not seek to destroy others. We want to safeguard and preserve our history, symbols and language, we want to "experience" our traditions – and for ourselves, not in competition with others. Now all that is being pilloried by the propaganda of those on the centre-left, who act as if they alone can judge such matters properly. The interview with Prof. Imhof corrects precisely these false prejudices by clearly pointing out that neo-liberals have long waged war on the state and thus patriotism.

MARIANNE THARAN, HUNGARY, BY E-MAIL

Swiss music with or without an alpine horn

The alpenhorn and yodelling are indispensable ingredients of Swiss folk music. Yodelling and playing the alpine horn were originally used for signalling, calling from mountain to mountain and communicating between one alpine pasture and another. In 1827, the musicologist Joseph Fétis described the alpine horn as "Switzerland's national instrument". Although it has almost completely disappeared from the Alps, it has increasingly become a tourist attraction. The alpine horn has undergone a revival as a solo instrument in modern music since 1970. It could be said that Jean Daetwyler's "Concerto pour cor des alpes et orchestre" signalled a new development in 1972. The piece was first performed at the Palais Garnier in Paris to mark the opening of the Swiss tourist office in the French capital. Today there are more than 50 compositions for alpenhorn accompanied by orchestras, wind ensembles, organs, pianos or harps.

Swissinfo/SRI has compiled a double CD of alpenhorn music, the musical spectrum of which ranges from traditional alpine horn playing and yodelling via pop and rock to jazz and modern-day electronic music. Nobody could claim alpenhorn music and yodelling, which have rarely been practiced as conscientiously and differently as they are today, as their sole preserve. Some yodellers and alpenhorn players seek out their roots and try to emulate their melodiousness and "blues" as authentically as possible. Others take them a step further. You'll therefore find yodellers in traditional costume, rock musicians who inject a touch of their indigenous roots into their Anglo-American music, and jazzmen who view the archaic melodies as an exciting basis for their work. Composers like Schubert, Beethoven and Brahms were musically inspired by this "folk music", as are present-day pop musicians and the musical avant-garde. The album "Swiss Alpine Music" presents the complete panoply of Swiss folk music and is a treat for all lovers of high-quality folk music.



Its release coincides almost exactly with that of a CD entitled "Greatest Swiss Hits", which should really have been called "Greatest German Swiss Hits", even though Sens Unik, Stress and other musicians from French-speaking Switzerland have also made it into the hit list. In actual fact, it was television viewers in German-speaking Switzerland who got to vote for their favourite hits of the last 70 years one Saturday evening this autumn. With 12.8 percent of the votes, Polo Hofer's hit "Alperose" from 1985 just made the top spot ahead of the song "Träne" by Florian Ast and Francine Jordi. Third place went to Mani Matter's "Hemmige" from the year 1970, while Hazy Osterwald's legendary "Kriminaltango" (1959) finished fourth in the audience straw poll. Nevertheless, the CD also features nearly all the other unforgettable tunes of years gone by, spanning everything from the Sauterelles via Nella Martinetti and the Trio Eugster to Stephan Eicher and Yello. The CD isn't just a tasty morsel for the nostalgic, rather it is an essential musical compilation for all fans of typical Swiss popular music. EC

Swiss Alpine Music: www.swissinfo.org
Greatest Swiss Hits: www.universalmusic.ch